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Alternative possibilities in descartes's fourth meditation

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ARTICLE

ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES IN DESCARTES'S FOURTH MEDITATION

C. P. Ragland

According to what philosophers nowadays call the *principle of alternative possibilities* (PAP), if a person chooses something freely, then she could have chosen otherwise.¹ PAP makes freedom a 'two-way' power: we are free with respect to a certain choice only if we are able both to make that choice, and not to make that choice. In some texts from 1644 onwards, Descartes seems to embrace PAP,² but it is hard to tell whether he accepts or rejects PAP in the earlier *Meditations* (1641).

This paper aims to clarify Descartes's earlier position by carefully examining his definition of freedom in the Fourth Meditation:

the will, or freedom of choice . . . simply consists in this: that we are able to do or not do (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather [*vel potius*], simply in this: that we are carried in such a way toward what the intellect proposes for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, that we do not feel ourselves determined to it by any external force.

(AT 7: 57/CSM 2: 40)

Whether we take this definition to assert PAP will depend on how we read the 'or rather'. On the one hand, it might *retract* the opening idea that

¹Harry Frankfurt introduced this terminology in 'Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility', *Journal of Philosophy*, 66: 829–39.

²See *Principles of Philosophy* I.37 (AT 8a: 18–19/CSM 1: 205) and the 9 February 1645 letter to Mesland (AT 4: 173/CSMK 245). For a later text that may reject PAP, see the 2 May 1644 letter to Mesland (AT 4: 115–16/CSMK 233). References to Descartes employ the following abbreviations:

AT Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, (eds), *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 2nd edn, 11 vols (Paris: Vrin/C.N.R.S., 1974–86).

CSM 1 *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume I*, translated by Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

CSM 2 *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II*, translated by Cottingham *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

CSMK *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume III: The Correspondence*, translated by Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch and Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Translations are from CSM or CSMK unless otherwise noted.

freedom requires alternative possibilities, so that only the second part of the definition truly expresses the essence of freedom. On the other hand, it might mean 'in other words', so that the second part of the definition *clarifies* the nature of the alternative possibilities required for freedom.

To determine which of these readings is correct, we need to pay careful attention to the context of the definition. One fact about the context is especially important: Descartes intended the definition to explain why our free will makes us 'bear in some way the image and likeness of God' (AT 7: 57/CSM 2: 40).³ I will argue that this fact works against a retraction reading of the 'or rather' and in favour of a clarification reading. If the clarification reading is correct, then Descartes does endorse PAP in the *Meditations*. This conclusion bears on three important questions.

First, did Descartes's views about free will change over time? Disputes about this question tend to focus on PAP, and commentators adopt three different positions:

- (a) In the *Meditations*, Descartes denied PAP, but he later affirmed it;⁴
- (b) Descartes never endorsed PAP;⁵
- (c) Descartes always accepted PAP.⁶

³I think the implications of this fact have not been emphasized enough by commentators. They are very briefly noted in Lilli Alanen, 'Intuition, Assent, and Necessity: The Question of Descartes' Psychologism', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 64 (1999) 112, and in Charles Larmore, 'Descartes' Psychologistic Theory of Assent', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1 (1984) No. 1: 68.

⁴See Etienne Gilson, *La liberté chez Descartes et la théologie* (Paris: Alcan, 1913) 286–336, esp. 310–19; Alexander Boyce Gibson, *The Philosophy of Descartes* (London: Methuen, 1932) 332–9; and Michelle Beyssade, 'Descartes's Doctrine of Freedom: Differences between the French and Latin Texts of the Fourth Meditation', in *Reason, Will, and Sensation: Studies in Descartes's Metaphysics*, edited by John Cottingham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 191–206.

⁵See Larmore; Anthony Kenny, 'Descartes on the Will', in *Cartesian Studies*, edited by R. J. Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972) 1–31; and Jean-Marie Beyssade, *La Philosophie Première de Descartes: Le temps et la cohérence de la métaphysique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979) 177–214.

⁶See S. V. Keeling, *Descartes* (London: Ernest Benn, 1934) 186–90; Lucien Laberthonnière, *Études sur Descartes in Oeuvres de Laberthonnière* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1935), vol. 1, pp. 418–31; Jean Laporte, 'La liberté selon Descartes', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 44 (1937) 101–64, esp. 120–46; Jean-Marc Gabaude, *Liberté et raison (La liberté cartésienne et sa réfraction chez Spinoza et chez Leibniz)*, Vol. I: *Philosophie réflexive de la volonté* (Toulouse: Association des publications de la faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Toulouse, 1970) 161–97; Robert Inlay, 'Descartes and Indifference', *Studia Leibnitiana*, 14 (1982) No. 1: 87–97; Georges J. D. Moyal, 'The Unity of Descartes' Conception of Freedom', *International Studies in Philosophy*, 19 (1987) No. 1: 33–51 and 'Magicians, Doubters and Perverts', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 50 (1996) No. 195: 73–107; Lilli Alanen, 'Descartes on the Will and the Power to do Otherwise', in *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, edited by Henrik Lagerlund and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002); James Petrik, *Descartes' Theory of the Will* (Durango, CO: Hollowbrook Publishing, 1992); and Joseph Keim Campbell, 'Descartes on Spontaneity, Indifference, and Alternatives', in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, edited by Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 179–99.

My interpretation rules out the first two positions, and thus establishes a good *prima facie* case for the third view that Descartes *always* endorsed PAP.⁷

Second, was Descartes a compatibilist or incompatibilist about free will and determinism? Many able readers – Leibniz and Spinoza among them – have taken him to be an incompatibilist, while many others think he is a compatibilist.⁸ I will not try to conclusively settle this dispute, but I will argue that Descartes's emphasis on the similarity between divine and human freedom weighs in favour of the suggestion that he was an incompatibilist.

Finally, and most importantly, how did Descartes understand the traditional Christian claim that humans bear the image of God? Descartes thinks that like all creatures, humans resemble God in so far as they are substances (AT 5: 156/CSMK 340). In addition, humans resemble God in their actions: like God, they act not from a necessity of nature but from free will, and hence are able to do otherwise than they do. For Descartes the human will, like the divine, is self-determining, allowing humans to play a genuinely creative role in the cosmos. Little wonder, then, that Descartes declares:

Free will is in itself the noblest thing we can have, since it makes us in a way equal to God and seems to exempt us from being his subjects; and so its correct use is the greatest of all the goods we possess.

(AT 5: 85/CSMK 326)

I

Michelle Beyssade takes Descartes's definition of freedom to deny PAP. She says: '*vel potius*...introduces a correction and withdraws what precedes ...'⁹ She concludes that (in the Latin edition of the *Meditations*) freedom 'does not require a two-way power, but consists

⁷Fully establishing the third position would require proving that Descartes consistently accepted PAP in later texts. That task is beyond the scope of this paper, but I take it up in 'Descartes on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities' (forthcoming from *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44 (2006) No. 3: 377–94).

⁸On Leibniz's and Spinoza's view of Cartesian freedom, see John Cottingham, *The Rationalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 159–62. Cottingham himself there seems to read Descartes as a compatibilist, as he also does in 'Descartes and the Voluntariness of Belief', *The Monist* 85 (2002) No. 3: 343–60. Larmore, Kenny, Petrik and Campbell read Descartes as a compatibilist, as does Vere Chappell in 'Descartes's Compatibilism', in *Reason, Will, and Sensation*, 177–90. Alanen, Laporte, Moyal and Keeling seem to read him as a libertarian, as does Peter Schouls in *Descartes and the Enlightenment* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989) 77–98. Ferdinand Alqu   presents Descartes as endorsing PAP throughout his career, but moving from a compatibilist understanding of alternatives in the *Meditations* to an incompatibilist understanding in later texts; see his *La d  couverte m  taphysique de l'homme chez Descartes*, 2nd edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966) 280–99.

⁹Michelle Beyssade, 206.

merely in being unconstrained: it is the spontaneous movement towards something'.¹⁰ One might object: if Descartes wanted to entirely nullify the first clause, why didn't he simply erase it?¹¹ However, Beyssade does not take the 'or rather' to retract the first clause itself, but rather its apparent implication: that freedom requires alternative possibilities. Anthony Kenny makes it clear that on a retraction reading, the first clause can still play an important role.

Kenny distinguishes between 'liberty of indifference' and 'liberty of spontaneity'. We have liberty of indifference with regard to doing something just in case 'it is in our power not to do it'. We have liberty of spontaneity 'if and only if we do it because we want to do it'.¹² According to Kenny, the first clause shows that 'freewill often does consist in liberty of indifference', while *vel potius* and the second clause show that 'sometimes [freedom] consists only in liberty of spontaneity, and *that is all that is essential to it*'.¹³

According to Kenny, Descartes thinks that whenever the intellect perceives things with less than perfect clarity, our freedom consists in both alternative possibilities and spontaneity: we can assent or not assent to what is less than fully certain, and either way we act spontaneously.¹⁴ However, when we perceive something clearly and distinctly, our freedom consists in spontaneity alone: we cannot avoid assenting to what we clearly and distinctly perceive, but we still assent freely, because spontaneously. On Kenny's reading, Cartesian freedom is basically just the 'power to avoid error' (AT 7: 61/CSM 2: 43). In circumstances where it is possible to err, freedom requires that it is *also* possible *not* to err. Where error is impossible, two-way power is unnecessary. This account of freedom calls to mind Anselm's claim that freedom is simply the power to keep uprightness of will for its own sake (and so does not necessarily involve two-way power), as well as Susan Wolf's insistence that freedom is 'asymmetrical'.¹⁵

The best evidence for the retraction reading comes from passages like the 'great light passage' following shortly after the definition of freedom. Descartes says of the *cogito* argument:

I *could not but judge* something which I understood so clearly to be true; not because I was compelled so to judge by any external force, but because a great

¹⁰Ibid, 194. Similarly, Gilson claims that Descartes 'renounces the requirement of indeterminism for our liberty, and is satisfied by simple absence of constraint' (310).

¹¹Jean Laporte, *Le rationalisme de Descartes*, 3rd edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988) 271. Inlay makes a similar point when discussing Gilson's reading ('Descartes and Indifference') 91.

¹²Kenny, 17.

¹³Ibid, 18; my italics.

¹⁴Ibid, 20.

¹⁵Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii in Opera omnia*, edited by Schmitt (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946) I, 225; Susan Wolf, 'Asymmetrical Freedom', *Journal of Philosophy*, 77 (1980): 151–66.

light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will, and thus I have believed this more spontaneously and freely as I have been less indifferent to it.¹⁶

(AT 7: 58–9/CSM 2: 41; my translation and italics)

Descartes could not refrain from judging the *cogito* true, and yet he insists that his judgement was free. This strongly suggests that alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom.

Despite this strong support, the retraction reading faces a serious difficulty: it is hard to reconcile with Descartes's emphasis on the similarity between the divine and human will. To see why, we must first explore some crucial background.

In the second clause of his definition of freedom, Descartes identifies freedom with a certain way of being 'carried toward what the intellect proposes for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance'. Here, as elsewhere, Descartes presupposes that the human will cannot act except toward some object in the intellect.¹⁷ The intellect must grasp this object as *good* or *true* in some respect. As Descartes puts it, the human will 'cannot tend toward anything else' other than truth or goodness (AT 7: 432/CSM 2: 292).¹⁸

According to Descartes's definition, freedom is a way of 'being carried' toward an object presented by the intellect. Descartes clarifies the 'carrying' metaphor with the following remark: 'For in order to be free it is not necessary that I can be carried in both directions, but on the contrary, the more I incline [*propendeo*] in one direction . . . the more freely do I choose it' (AT 7: 57–8/CSM 2: 40; my translation). We can be carried in both directions only if we are inclined in both directions, so inclinations must be what 'carry' us. Apparent truths or goods put forward by the intellect produce corresponding inclinations toward themselves in the will. The inclination that 'carries' us is the one upon which we finally act. Because we can have conflicting inclinations at the same time, we are subject to 'indifference'.

Shortly after defining freedom, Descartes says:

the indifference I feel when no reason impels me in one direction more than another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any

¹⁶Similar passages include AT 7: 69/CSM 2: 48; AT 7: 145/CSM 2: 104; AT 7: 166/CSM 2: 117; AT 8a: 21/CSM 1: 207; AT 3: 64/CSMK 147; and AT 4: 115–6/CSMK 233–4.

¹⁷According to the Fifth Replies, 'when we direct our will towards something, we always have some sort of understanding of some aspect of it . . .' (AT 7: 377/CSM 2: 259); and *Principles* I.34 says: 'In order to make a judgement, the intellect is of course required since, in the case of something which we do not in any way perceive, there is no judgement we can make' (AT 8a: 18/CSM 1: 204). See also *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* (AT 8b: 363/CSM 1: 307) and Chappell, 187.

¹⁸Further evidence: 'the will does not tend toward evil except in so far as it is presented to it by the intellect under some aspect of goodness' (AT 1: 366/CSMK 56).

perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation.

(AT 7: 58/CSM 2: 40)

In a letter commenting on this passage, Descartes discusses the meaning of 'indifference' at length.

'indifference' in this context seems to me strictly to mean the state the will is in when it is not impelled more in one direction than in another by any perception of truth or goodness [*a nulla veri vel boni perceptione in unam magis quam in aliam partem impellitur*]. This is the sense in which I took it when I said that the lowest degree of freedom is that by which we determine ourselves to things to which we are indifferent. But perhaps others mean by 'indifference' a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or other of two contraries, that is to say, to pursue or avoid, to affirm or deny.

(AT 4: 173/CSMK 245)

Descartes notes that 'indifference' has two senses: it can mean either a certain kind of motivational state, or the ability to choose otherwise. Descartes indicates that when he uses the term strictly, he means it to denote the motivational state.¹⁹

If the will is indifferent, reasons do not impel it 'more in one direction than in another'. The 'directions' are possible acts of will, and indifference is a kind of balance or rational equilibrium. Descartes says that we are indifferent when 'we recognize many reasons *pro* but as many reasons *contra*' (AT 4: 174/CSMK 245), as when we have equal reason to either affirm or deny a proposition. We would also be indifferent if we perceived *no reasons at all* relevant to a choice: we would have no more reasons *pro* than *contra*, because motivation on either side would be nil. Perfect indifference is a state in which the will either is not motivated at all by reasons (indifference of non-motivation), or is equally motivated in more than one direction by reasons (indifference of multidirectional motivation).

Indifference comes in degrees for Descartes, and the perfectly balanced indifference just described is only its most extreme form. He says that a person 'is more indifferent the fewer reasons he knows which impel him to choose one side rather than another' (AT 4: 115/CSMK 233). When discussing a case of conflicting motivations, he says: 'the more equally these two judgments move us the more indifference... they confer on us' (AT

¹⁹For an excellent discussion of the meaning of 'indifference' covering many of the same issues I discuss here, see Dan Kaufman, 'Infimus gradus libertatis? Descartes on Indifference and Divine Freedom', *Religious Studies*, 39 (2003): 391–406.

4: 174/CSMK 245–6).²⁰ We are *most* indifferent when the reasons *pro* and *contra* are perfectly balanced in strength, and less indifferent when the reasons on one side are stronger than those on the other. We cease to be indifferent altogether when we are motivated in only one direction.

In the *Sixth Replies*, Descartes explains how indifference relates to both divine and human freedom:

It is self-contradictory to suppose that the will of God was not indifferent from eternity with respect to everything which has happened or will ever happen; for it is impossible to imagine that anything is thought of in the divine intellect as good or true, or worthy of belief or action or omission, prior to the decision of the divine will to make it so . . . Thus the supreme indifference to be found in God is the supreme indication of his omnipotence. But as for man, since he finds that the nature of all goodness and truth is already determined by God, and his will cannot tend toward anything else, it is evident that he will embrace what is good and true all the more willingly, and hence more freely, in proportion as he sees it more clearly. He is never indifferent except when he does not know which of the two alternatives is the better or truer, or at least when he does not see this clearly enough to rule out any possibility of doubt . . . indifference does not belong to the essence of human freedom, since not only are we free when ignorance of what is right makes us indifferent, but we are also free – indeed at our freest – when a clear perception impels us to pursue some object.

(AT 7: 431–3/CSM 2: 291–2)

The human will cannot act except toward some pre-existing truth or goodness, but the divine will can, because it is the *creator* of all truth and goodness: God thinks of nothing as good or true prior to his free decree to make it so. This fundamental difference between God and humans produces three important contrasts between divine and human indifference.

First, God's indifference is a state of complete non-motivation, while the only interesting sort of human indifference is a state of multidirectional motivation. It is impossible for God's choices to be motivated by any prior awareness of reasons. Therefore, God has the indifference of non-motivation and hence (trivially) also has the highest degree of indifference (perfect balance). Because humans cannot choose anything without first perceiving it as good, they cannot choose from a state of complete non-motivation. In so far as it is relevant to choice, human indifference is always an indifference of *multidirectional* motivation.

Second, divine indifference signifies power, human indifference weakness. In his omnipotence, God freely creates all standards of truth and goodness, so there cannot be pre-existing standards to guide his decision. His

²⁰In another letter, Descartes says that a person is 'more indifferent the fewer reasons he knows which impel him to choose one side rather than another' (AT 4: 155/CSMK 233). Again, degree of indifference is measured by degree of balance.

indifference is thus ‘the supreme indication of his omnipotence’. Humans, by contrast, are indifferent only when we fail to perceive truth or goodness with perfect clarity. Descartes’s position here is ambiguous. He may mean that the human will never experiences multidirectional motivation unless there is obscurity in the intellect. Alternatively, he may mean that for humans ‘indifference’ means not simply ‘multidirectional motivation’, but ‘multidirectional motivation produced by ignorance’ (on this latter interpretation, there could be multidirectional motivation that is not indifference). Either way, the contrast with divine freedom is clear: humans are indifferent only because our intellect is weak and limited.

Finally, indifference is essential to God’s freedom, but not to human freedom. God cannot be free without being indifferent, because God’s will is *necessarily* indifferent (non-motivated). Furthermore, if (*per impossible*) God’s will had not been indifferent, he would not have been able to choose otherwise, and hence would not have been free.²¹ ‘If some reason for a thing’s being good had preceded [God’s] preordination, that reason *would have determined him to make that which is best*’ (AT 7: 435/CSM 2: 294; my translation and italics).²² If God were not indifferent, he would not be free with respect to creation (perhaps this is why Descartes once told Mersenne that to talk of independent eternal truths ‘is to talk of [God] as if he were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject him to the Styx and the Fates’ (AT 1: 145/CSMK 23)). Humans, by contrast, can be free without being indifferent. Indeed, we are most free when we are least indifferent.²³

Despite these differences, Descartes also insists that the human will resembles the divine will. In 1639, Descartes told Mersenne: ‘God has given us a will which has no limits. It is principally because of this infinite will within us that we can say we are created in his image . . .’ (AT 2: 628/CSMK 141–2). Descartes expands on this thought in the passage that introduces the definition of freedom:

It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way

²¹It is clear that for Descartes, God’s freedom consists in the ability to do otherwise. For example, he says that God ‘was free to make it not true that all the radii of the circle are equal – just as free as he was not to create the world’ (AT 1: 152/CSMK 25), and that ‘God cannot have been determined to make it true that contradictories cannot be true together, and therefore that he could have done the opposite’ (AT 4: 118/CSMK 235).

²²The relevant sentence reads: *nam si quae ratio boni eius praeordinationem antecessisset, illa ipsum determinasset ad id quod optimum est faciendum*. CSM translates it thus: ‘If some reason for something’s being good had existed prior to his preordination, this would have determined God to prefer those things which it was best to do.’ In English ‘to prefer’ sometimes mean ‘to choose’, sometimes merely ‘to be inclined toward’. However, the idiomatic Latin phrase *ad id faciendum* is unambiguous: it means ‘to make it’.

²³Descartes reiterates the possibility of being free without being indifferent at AT 7: 58/CSM 2: 40 and AT 4: 118/CSMK 234.

the image and likeness of God. For although God's will is incomparably greater than mine, both in virtue of the knowledge and power that accompany it and make it more firm and efficacious, and also in virtue of its object, in that it ranges over a greater number of items, nevertheless it does not seem any greater than mine when considered as will in the essential and strict sense [*in se formaliter & praeclara spectata*]. This is because [*quia*] the will simply consists in this: that we are able to do or not do.

(AT 7: 56–7/CSM 2: 39–40)

Descartes denies that any essence pertains univocally to God and creatures (AT 7: 433/CSM 2: 292), so he does not mean that the divine and human will share the same essence. Rather, he thinks there is an *analogy* between divine and human wills, just as there is an analogy between divine and created substance.²⁴

In the *Principles* Descartes defines substance as 'a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other things for its existence'. He notes that only God is a substance in this sense. However, he goes on to define created substances as things that 'need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist', and hence do not depend on any other *created* things (AT 9b: 47/CSM 1: 210). Even though 'the term "substance" does not apply univocally . . . to God and to other things' (AT 8a: 24/CSM 1: 210), there is an analogy between divine and created substance because they share a common feature: both involve the general idea of ontological independence. In a similar way, the passage above suggests that some feature is common to the essence of both divine and human freedom.²⁵ The phrase 'this is because' sets a task for the definition of freedom that follows it: to explain why our will is an 'image and likeness' of God's by identifying the feature common to both.

In this context, the first clause certainly *appears* to identify two-way power as the common feature; but on the retraction reading of the 'or

²⁴Other passages asserting similarity between divine and human will include AT 11: 445/CSM 1: 384 and AT 5: 85/CSM 2: 326. The idea of an analogy between divine and created substance is also suggested near the end of the Third Meditation (AT 7: 51/CSM 2: 35) and discussed at length in the *Conversation with Burman* (AT 5: 156/CSM 2: 339–40). For an excellent discussion of these passages and relevant scholastic background, see Tad Schmaltz, 'The Disappearance of Analogy in Descartes, Spinoza, and Regis', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 30, No. 1: 85–114. Schmaltz argues, in effect, that Descartes's understanding of divine simplicity conflicts with his belief in an analogy between the divine and human wills. Schmaltz's evaluation may be correct, but it does not undermine my claim: the Fourth Meditation (coherently or not) posits an analogy.

²⁵Descartes's denial of univocity might seem to mean that (a) there is *no* feature that belongs essentially to both divine and human wills. However, the denial responds to the following argument in the Sixth Set of Objections: 'if indifference cannot be a proper part of human freedom, neither will it find a place in divine freedom, since the essences of things are, like numbers, indivisible and immutable' (AT 7: 417/CSM 2: 281). The objectors assume that (b) a feature is essential to the divine will if and only if it is also essential to the human will. Descartes intends his remark as a denial of (b), not as an assertion of (a).

rather', this must be a misleading appearance, for on that reading, two-way power is not essential to human freedom, and so cannot be the feature essential to both divine and human freedom.²⁶ If the retraction reading is correct, then Descartes must identify the true point of similarity somewhere in the *second* clause of the definition. This implication of the retraction reading is implausible for two reasons.

First, if Descartes thought that the first clause *misidentified* the point of similarity, then why did he not simply delete it? As we have seen, if Descartes were simply discussing the nature of human freedom, he might have reason to begin with a non-essential property of the will (two-way power). But in this context he is not just discussing the nature of freedom. He is trying to identify a feature essential to both divine and human freedom. If two-way power is not that feature, then it is extremely misleading for him to leave the first clause in place.

In addition, the second clause contains only two candidates for the point of similarity – spontaneity and the absence of external determination – and it seems unlikely that Descartes would consider either a viable alternative to two-way power. Spontaneity involves being carried by inclination toward what the intellect has put forward for our decision. Therefore, it can exist only if the intellect grasps some things as true or good prior to the will's choice. Descartes, however, explicitly denies that God's intellect grasps things as true or good prior to God's free decree. Therefore, spontaneity cannot belong to God's will, and hence cannot be common to both divine and human freedom.

Freedom from external determination seems more promising. The second clause of the definition suggests that the absence of external determination is essential to human freedom. Descartes must think that God, too, cannot be externally determined, for prior to God's free decision to create, there are no forces outside him.²⁷ However, in the only text that can be taken to claim explicitly that God is not externally determined, Descartes takes this lack of determination to *imply* that God has alternative possibilities: 'God cannot have been determined to make it true that contradictories cannot be true together, and therefore... he could have done the opposite' (AT 4: 118/CSMK 235).²⁸ Descartes seems to assume that if an agent *A* is not

²⁶Even if we supposed that the point of similarity did not need to be essential to both the divine and human will, identifying two-way power as the point of resemblance would (on the retraction reading) imply that we are most Godlike in our freedom when we are most ignorant. I suspect Descartes would not find this implication acceptable.

²⁷Charles Larmore notes that the similarity between the divine and human will creates a problem for his reading of Cartesian freedom (which seems similar to Kenny's retraction reading). Larmore suggests that the idea of freedom from external determination may provide a solution. See Charles Larmore, 'Descartes' Psychologistic Theory of Assent', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1 (1984): 66–8.

²⁸There is some doubt as to whether reasons in the divine intellect should count as 'external' to God. However, as Dan Kaufman has pointed out to me, Descartes's remark about the Styx and Fates (AT 1: 145/CSMK 23) probably *implies* that God is not subject to any external force.

determined by some force *F*, then given *F*, *A* could have done otherwise. This means that when humans are not externally determined, they also possess two-way power in some sense; so while freedom from external determination could potentially work as the point of similarity between divine and human freedom, it is not a genuine alternative to two-way power, because (in Descartes's view) it *implies* such power.

Two other passages about the 'greatness' of the will also strongly suggest that two-way power is essential to freedom.

I cannot complain that the will or freedom of choice which I received from God is not sufficiently extensive or perfect, since I know by experience that it is not restricted in any way. Indeed, I think it is very noteworthy that there is nothing else in me which is so perfect and so great that the possibility of a *further increase* in its perfection or greatness is beyond my understanding.

(AT 7: 56–7/CSM 2: 39; my italics)

Nor do I have any cause for complaint on the grounds that God gave me a will which extends more widely than my intellect. For since the will consists simply of one thing which is, as it were, indivisible, it seems that its nature rules out the possibility of anything being *taken away* from it.

(AT 7: 60/CSM 2: 42; my italics)

Together, these passages suggest that freedom consists – at least in part – in something that does *not* admit of degrees and so can be neither increased nor diminished. Descartes clearly thinks that the kind of spontaneous self-determination described in the second clause *does* admit of degrees. In the great light passage, he declares that 'the spontaneity and freedom of my belief was all the greater in proportion to my lack of indifference', and elsewhere he says: 'neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it' (AT 7: 58/CSM 2: 40). He also says that we are 'at our freest' when clear perceptions cause us to be inclined in only one direction (AT 7: 433/CSM 2: 292). Therefore, it seems that if spontaneity were the *only* thing essential to human freedom, such freedom could be greater (or lesser) than it now is: if the intellect had more (or fewer) clear perceptions, the will would enjoy a greater (or lesser) degree of freedom. Since there is something about freedom that does *not* admit of degrees, there must be something *else* essential to freedom. The ability to do otherwise fills the role of this 'something else' perfectly.²⁹

Descartes links the idea of alternative possibilities to divine freedom in the following passage: God 'was free to make it not true that all the radii of the circle are equal – just as free as he was not to create the world' (AT 1: 152/CSMK 25).

²⁹For a very similar argument, see Imlay, 91–2. Here is another way of making the same point: if only spontaneity were essential to freedom, then the greatness of human freedom would be a function of the perfection in the human intellect. We would expect the will to reach infinite perfection only if the intellect were also infinitely perfect; but Descartes insists that 'the will is

II

When we consider that the definition of freedom is supposed to explain the similarity between divine and human freedom, a retraction reading of the ‘or rather’ begins to look quite implausible. Descartes’s related remarks about the greatness of the will produce the same result. It is much more plausible that Descartes intended the second clause to *further develop or clarify* the first clause’s claim that freedom requires alternative possibilities.³⁰ The two formulations each define the very same human freedom, and ‘or rather’ means ‘in other (better) words’.³¹ The first clause defines freedom in terms that apply equally well to God or humans, the second in terms that apply only to humans. The second clause is ‘better’ (*potius*) because it tells us something crucial about human freedom, which is Descartes’s principle subject at that point in the Fourth Meditation.

However, this interpretation faces an obvious difficulty: in the great light passage, Descartes insists that his judgement was free even though he *could not but judge* the *cogito* true. How is a defender of the clarification reading to deal with this problem? The most promising strategy is to claim that Descartes distinguished between two senses of ‘could have done otherwise’. In the great light passage, though there is a sense in which Descartes lacks two-way power, there is also a sense in which he does not. Freedom requires two-way power only in the latter sense. What exactly, then, are the two senses of ‘could’ or ‘can’ at play here?

Perhaps when Descartes says ‘I could not but judge’ the *cogito* true, he means only that it would be immoral or irrational to do anything else: ‘could not but judge’ means ‘ought to judge’.³² If the great light passage is making only this *normative* point, then it does not conflict with PAP: it does not deny that *descriptively* speaking, Descartes could have done otherwise (by failing to act in accordance with the norms of reason or morality). Descartes’s 1645 letter to Mesland seems to support this sort of reading, for it says: ‘when a very evident reason moves us in one direction, although *morally* speaking we can hardly move in the contrary direction, absolutely speaking we can’ (AT 4: 173/CSMK 245; my italics).

greater and more godlike than the intellect’ (AT 5: 159/CSMK 342). The will is infinite and nothing can be taken away from it, while ‘it is in the nature of a finite intellect to lack understanding of many things’ (AT 7: 60/CSM 2: 42). Therefore, the scope of will *must* exceed the scope of the intellect in created beings. God’s will ranges over more objects than ours only in its *actual* exercise, the human will is just as extensive as God’s in so far as it is a *power* to will or not will any possible object.

³⁰Laporte (see esp. *Rationalisme de Descartes*, 271) Gabaude (168–71), Campbell (186–7), and Imlay (91–2) advance this sort of reading.

³¹See Gabaude, 171; Kenny, 18.

³²This sort of reading is advanced in Alanen (1999) 109–12; in Alquié, 286; in Moyal (1987 and 1996); and in Marlin, 207–8.

Though this way of reading the great light passage is consistent with my main thesis, I am sceptical of it. I agree that Descartes is making a normative point, but I think he is also making a descriptive point about his nature, as parallel passages make clear. For example, in the Fifth Meditation, Descartes says 'my *nature* is such that so long as I perceive something very clearly and distinctly I cannot but believe it to be true' (my italics; AT 7: 69/CSM 2: 48), and a letter to Regius declares that 'our mind is of *such a nature* that it cannot help assenting to what it clearly understands' (my italics; AT 3: 64/CSMK 147).³³ Some might claim that the 'cannot' in these passages is still purely normative, so that they describe our nature as subject to norms of reason. However, it is more plausible to see these passages as describing a limitation on our power to do otherwise, a limitation that follows from the very nature of the human will as a rational appetite oriented toward truth and goodness.³⁴

Descartes says: 'if we were wholly certain that what we are doing is bad, we would refrain from doing it, since the will tends only towards objects that have some semblance of goodness' (AT 11: 464/CSM 1: 392).³⁵ Assuming that tending toward an object is being inclined toward it, Descartes's point is this: if the intellect does not represent a potential action as somehow good, then we would not be inclined toward it, and would not do it. A parallel passage goes even further, suggesting that we *could* not do it: 'If the intellect never represented anything to the will as good without its actually being so, the will could never go wrong in its choice' (AT 1: 366/CSMK 56). In these passages, Descartes is not making a normative point. Instead, he is describing the psychological underpinnings of choice in an effort to elucidate the 'common scholastic doctrine' that 'whoever sins does so in ignorance' (AT 1: 366/CSMK 56).

In his elucidation of this doctrine, Descartes assumes that we cannot choose to do something unless we are inclined to do it, and we cannot be inclined toward something unless the intellect represents it as somehow good (because the will is naturally oriented toward goodness).³⁶ What happens, then, if the intellect contains nothing but a representation of some course of action *A* as good? The will cannot pursue any alternative course of action *B*, because *B* is not represented as good. Can the will hold back from pursuing *A*; or is it *determined* to pursue *A* in these circumstances?

³³See also AT 7: 166/CSM 2: 117 and AT 7: 145/CSM 2: 104.

³⁴For a good discussion of this natural orientation, see Chappell, 186–9.

³⁵A parallel passage: 'the will does not tend toward evil except in so far as it is presented to it by the intellect under some aspect of goodness' (AT 1: 366/CSMK 56).

³⁶Descartes also presents the will as oriented toward truth (AT 7: 431–3/CSM 2: 291–2), yielding the parallel claim that we cannot assent to a proposition unless the intellect presents it as at least possibly true. But for the sake of simplicity in the argument that follows, I will describe assent as an action aimed at the good – specifically, the good of believing or knowing the truth.

Lilli Alanen has recently argued that it would not be determined. According to Alanen, Descartes, like Duns Scotus, thinks that the will always has a 'positive power' to elicit or not elicit its own acts.³⁷ In scholastic terms, if the intellect contains nothing but the thought that *A* is good, then the will lacks liberty with regard to the *specification* of its action (it is not able to will *A* or *B*), but it does retain liberty with regard to the *exercise* of its act (it can will *A* or not will *A*).³⁸ According to Alanen, Descartes thinks that when we are confronted with a clear and distinct perception that *P*, we cannot at that moment *deny P*, but we can *hold back* from affirming *P*.³⁹

Though Descartes's characterization of the will as *positiva facultas se determinandi* resembles some of Scotus's remarks, at least three pieces of textual evidence work against Alanen's interpretation. The first is Descartes's language in the great light passage. In the most literal translation of the Latin, Descartes says that he 'was not able not to judge' [*non potui . . . non judicare*] the *cogito* true. This phrasing suggests that not only could he not deny it, he could not even refrain from assenting to it.

Second, if Descartes took a Scotistic line, we would expect him to draw a sharp distinction between liberty of specification (e.g. pursuing versus fleeing) and liberty of exercise (pursuing versus doing nothing). In his definition of freedom, however, Descartes runs together the ability to 'do or not do' with the ability 'to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid'. This suggests that for Descartes, pursuing, fleeing and holding back are all equally positive ways of acting; to be within the will's power, each must be motivated by some reason.⁴⁰

Finally, in the 1645 letter to Mesland, Descartes explicitly says that the will has 'a positive faculty' of determining itself 'to one or other of two contraries' with respect to *all* its actions (AT 4: 173/CSMK 245). This remark is some of the best textual support for Alanen's interpretation. However, Descartes further explains his position like this: 'For it is always open to us to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, *provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing*' (AT 4: 173/CSMK 245; my italics). In the italicized proviso, Descartes suggests the will has the ability to hold back only if the intellect represents holding back as somehow good. If

³⁷Descartes refers to the will's 'positive power' in AT 4: 116, 173–4/CSMK 234, 245. For a more detailed summary of Scotus's position and use of similar terminology, see Alanen (2002) 287–91.

³⁸For more on the specification/exercise distinction, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.1 q9 a1, and Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (eds), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 1198–9.

³⁹Alanen (2002) 294.

⁴⁰In his discussion of indifference just following the great light passage, Descartes presents 'refraining from making a judgement' as an option on a par with affirming or denying (AT 759/CSM 2: 41).

Descartes thought (as Alanen would have it) that the will possesses this ability no matter what is in the intellect, there would be no reason for him to add the proviso.

Descartes seems to have thought that a human being is *able* to perform or not perform a given act of will at a given time if and only if at that time she is *inclined* both to perform it and not to perform it. When the intellect displays only one option as good, the will is inclined only one way and can therefore go only one way. Even to do nothing in such a case would be impossible, because it would be to pursue a course of action (holding back) for which there was no motivation. In my view, the great light passage describes this phenomenon. The clear perception of his own existence gave Descartes only one inclination in his will: the desire to assent. In the absence of any other inclination, he was unable *not* to judge the *cogito* true.

We cannot successfully reconcile the definition of freedom with the great light passage by claiming that the latter passage uses modal terms in a purely normative sense while the former uses them in a descriptive sense. The tension between the two passages is not intractable, however, because they employ modal terms in two different descriptive senses. Much of Descartes's language in the relevant texts suggests that he is aware of two different ways his readers might interpret his claim that 'we are able to do or not do'.

First, they might take him to mean that we can 'do or not do' given external forces, that the free will is not determined by external forces. To enjoy alternative possibilities in this sense is to have what I will call *liberty of self-determination*. We possess this liberty just in case there is some possible world with external forces (including laws of nature) exactly similar to the actual world, in which the will elicits a different act than it does in the actual world.

Second, readers might take Descartes to mean that we can 'do or not do' given both external forces and the will's own internal inclinations. This is what I call the *liberty of indifference*. We possess this liberty just in case there is a possible world exactly similar to our own with respect to both external forces and inclinations, in which the will elicits a different act. Liberty of indifference, then, is a species of self-determination: anyone enjoying it also enjoys liberty of self-determination, but not everyone enjoying liberty of self-determination necessarily enjoys liberty of indifference.

Liberty of indifference is the ability to choose in more than one way *because* we are inclined in more than one way. In the Fourth Meditation, unlike in the letter to Mesland, Descartes suggests that we enjoy this kind of liberty only when there is some lack of clarity in the intellect.⁴¹ Just after the

⁴¹In my opinion, this difference does not reflect any profound shift in Descartes's view. Rather, in the Fourth Meditation he is thinking only about agents wholeheartedly engaged in a search for truth, and who thus are not subject to the kinds of conflicting motivations – such as the desire to prove the extent of their freedom – that *do not* depend on ignorance, but nevertheless enable them to hold back from assenting to clear perceptions.

great light passage, he suggests that in cases where ‘the intellect does not have sufficiently clear knowledge at the time when the will deliberates’, the intellect displays more than one act of will as apparently good: assent, dissent and inaction (or pursuit, avoidance and inaction) each have some glimmer of goodness. This ambivalence in the intellect produces conflicting inclinations in the will: ‘although probable conjectures may pull me in one direction, the mere knowledge that they are simply conjectures, and not certain and indubitable reasons, is itself quite enough to push my assent the other way’ (AT 7: 59/CSM 2: 41). These conflicting motivations in turn give Descartes the ability to affirm, deny or suspend judgement with respect to such conjectures.⁴² Descartes concludes that God ‘has given me the freedom to assent or not assent in those cases where he did not endow my intellect with a clear and distinct perception’ (AT 7: 61/CSM 2: 42). Unclear perception generates multidirectional motivation in the will, and such motivation entails the ability to do or not do.

Descartes gestures at the distinction between liberty of indifference and liberty of self-determination in both the great light passage and the definition of freedom. In the great light passage, he says that he could not but judge the *cogito* true, ‘and *thus* I have believed this more spontaneously and freely as I have *been less indifferent* to it’ (AT 7: 58–9/CSM 2: 41; my italics). Descartes’s inability to withhold assent implies an absence of indifference. This suggests that he lacked the sort of alternative possibilities that depend on indifference. However, Descartes takes pains to point out that he was not determined by any external force: all the external forces acting on him left it an open question whether or not he would assent to the *cogito*. He lacked the ability to do otherwise, given both the external and internal circumstances of his choice, but he still possessed the ability to do otherwise, given only external circumstances. Therefore, the great light passage depicts a case in which Descartes enjoys liberty of self-determination, but not liberty of indifference.

In the definition of freedom, Descartes adds the ‘or rather’ and the second clause to clarify the sense in which human freedom requires the ability to ‘do or not do’: it requires only that when we are ‘carried’ toward an object presented by the intellect – i.e. when the will acts on one of its inclinations – we are not ‘determined to [this action] by any external force’.⁴³ Human

⁴² If, however, I simply refrain from making a judgement in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error. But if in such cases I either affirm or deny, then I am not using my free will correctly.

(AT 7: 59–60/CSM 2: 41)

⁴³ Some might object that Descartes requires only that we *feel* our actions to be free from external determination, not that they actually *be* thus undetermined. There are two reasons not to make heavy weather of the word ‘feel’. First, *sentiamus* probably here signifies our inner experience of freedom (AT 7: 56, 191, 377/CSM 2: 39, 134, 259; AT 8a: 6/CSM 1: 194; AT 4: 332/CSMK 277; AT 5: 159/CSMK 342), which Descartes thinks is clear and distinct, and hence veridical (AT 8a: 19–20/CSM 1: 205–6; AT 3: 161/CSMK 161; AT 7: 191/CSM 2: 134; see also

freedom requires only liberty of self-determination, not liberty of indifference.

Descartes needed to clarify the sense in which two-way power is necessary for freedom because he had just claimed that two-way power is the point of similarity between our freedom and God's. For Descartes, God not only enjoys liberty of indifference (because he is free from external determination and also enjoys the perfect equilibrium of non-motivation, guaranteeing that his will is not determined from within) but this indifference is *necessary* for God's freedom. Readers might take the analogy with divine freedom too far, concluding that because divine freedom depends on divine indifference, so human freedom depends on human indifference.

Descartes added the 'or rather' and the subsequent clause to prevent his readers from making this mistake, as is clear from the passage immediately following the definition of freedom:

For in order to be free it is not necessary that I can be carried in both directions [*neque enim opus est me in utramque partem ferri posse*], but on the contrary [*sed contra*], the more I incline [*propendeo*] in one direction – either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thoughts – the more freely do I choose it. Neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it. But the indifference I feel when no reason impels me in one direction more than another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation.

(AT 7: 57–8/CSM 2: 40; my translation)

As the opening 'for' indicates, this passage explains why Descartes added the 'or rather' and second clause: because the first formulation by itself might lead us to think that for freedom it is necessary that *me in utramque partem ferri posse*, when in fact this is not necessary.

Translation of this crucial phrase is controversial. CSM renders it: 'in order to be free, there is no need for me to be *inclined* both ways'. On this reading, Descartes says that two-way motivation is not necessary for freedom, but says nothing about whether or not two-way *power* is necessary for freedom. Michelle Beyssade argues that *ferri posse* is best given an active reading despite the grammatically passive form: 'in order to be free, it is not necessary that I be able to *carry myself* (or *go*) both

Campbell, 181). In this case the feeling of being undetermined probably implies that we really *are* undetermined. Second, Descartes insists that because we err freely, 'God is not the Cause of our Errors' (AT 8a: 16/CSM 1: 203; AT 7: 54, 60/CSM 2: 38, 41). However, if freedom is *merely* a feeling, and is thus consistent with behind-the-scenes external control, how can we be sure that God is not making us err after all?

ways'.⁴⁴ I prefer to render the Latin as literally as possible: 'it is not necessary that I be able to be carried both ways', because each of the other translations is partially correct, but misleading. Being able to be carried either way involves being motivated both ways, but for Descartes every instance of two-way motivation is both necessary and sufficient for possessing liberty of indifference at that time. So the passage also concerns an ability to go either way. However, this ability is not (as Beyssade would have it) two-way power in general. It is rather liberty of indifference – the *specific kind* of two-way power that springs from unclear perception and multidirectional motivation. Descartes added the 'or rather' to clarify that liberty of indifference is not necessary for human freedom, while liberty of self-determination is.

Once we have grasped the distinction between these two senses of the ability 'to do or not do', we can appreciate how nicely the two parts of the definition of freedom fit together with the passages immediately surrounding it. The passage just before the definition works together with the definition's first clause to explain the similarity between divine and human freedom: both, considered generically, consist in two-way power. The second formulation and the passage just after it show that at a more specific level of description, divine and human freedom are different: divine freedom consists essentially in liberty of indifference, but human freedom consists essentially in liberty of non-determination. The 'or rather' is a hinge on which Descartes's thought turns from general similarity to specific difference.

Interestingly, the specific differences between divine and human freedom parallel the specific differences between divine and created substance. Divine substance is absolutely independent: it depends on nothing else whatsoever. Created substance is relatively independent: it depends on no other creatures. In a similar way, divine freedom involves absolute independence of any causes whatsoever, whether external forces or internal motivations. Human freedom, on the other hand, requires only independence relative to external forces (the will can be freely determined from within by its motives).⁴⁵

Distinguishing between liberty of indifference and liberty of non-determination offers a plausible way to understand Descartes's doctrine of human freedom vis-à-vis divine freedom, but the liberty of non-determination remains ambiguous in two important respects. First, what does Descartes count as an 'external force'? It seems likely that God,⁴⁶

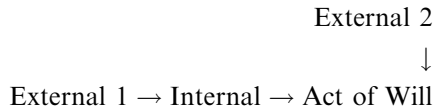
⁴⁴Passive verb forms used to convey an active, reflexive meaning are a Latin equivalent to the Greek middle voice. See M. Beyssade, 194.

⁴⁵I am grateful to Michael Della Rocca for suggesting that *Principles* I.51 might connect to my current topic.

⁴⁶For a detailed discussion of the relation of God to human freedom, see my 'Descartes on Divine Providence and Human Freedom', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 87 (2005) No. 2: 159–88.

demons, passions and past events over which we had no control would all count as external forces. What about the intellect? Does 'external' mean 'external to the self' (thinking substance), in which case the intellect counts as 'internal', or does it mean 'external to the will', in which case the intellect (or *anything* other than the will's own inclinations) would be an external force?

The second ambiguity is in the phrase 'determined to it'. The following diagram helps explain the two different things 'determined' could mean. The arrows represent causal determination, and time is represented as passing from left to right.



On a compatibilist reading, we are 'determined to it' just in case an external force directly determines the act of will and thereby blocks the causal efficacy of the will's own motives. In terms of the diagram, freedom requires that External 2 does not causally determine the act of will. Freedom does *not* require that the act be not determined by internal forces (though such indeterminism is consistent with freedom); *nor* does it require that those internal forces be not causally determined by prior external forces (represented in the diagram by External 1). On an incompatibilist reading, we are 'determined to it' just in case an external force determines the act of will either directly *or indirectly*. Therefore, freedom requires both that the act of will be not causally determined by External 2, and that if the act is determined by internal forces, those internal forces cannot themselves be causally determined by External 1.

Let us begin with the second ambiguity because we can make progress on it while leaving the meaning of 'external' an open question. I will now consider in turn the compatibilist and incompatibilist readings of 'determined', noting some important implications, strengths and weaknesses.

On the compatibilist reading we are undetermined, and hence 'able to do or not do' in the sense necessary for freedom, just in case our choice is not constrained, just in case we are doing what we *want* to do rather than what something outside us *makes* us do. If the compatibilist reading were correct, Kenny, Beyssade and Gilson would, after all, be right that for Descartes, freedom is essentially just spontaneity or non-constraint. However, they would be wrong in thinking that Descartes did not consider alternative possibilities necessary for freedom. Descartes's position would be, rather, that whenever the will is not constrained, it thereby enjoys alternative possibilities in the only sense necessary for freedom. Descartes would be what Joseph K. Campbell calls a 'two-way' compatibilist: someone who

thinks that freedom requires the ability to do otherwise, but then claims that we could have this ability even if determinism is true.⁴⁷

The two readings differ only over the role of indirect determination by external forces – on the compatibilist reading, indirect determination does not undermine freedom, but on the incompatibilist reading, it does. A number of key texts seem to support the compatibilist reading by suggesting that indirect determinism is no threat. For example, if we assume that the intellect is an external force, then the great light passage presents a case in which an external force (the intellect, filling the role of External 1 on the diagram) indirectly determines an act of will without compromising freedom. If the intellect is an internal force, it seems that we could reach the same conclusion with God in the role of External 1; for Descartes maintains that divine grace produces a great light in the intellect without threatening freedom (AT 7: 58/CSM 2: 40; see also AT 7: 148–9/CSM 2: 105–6), and he insists that God could have ensured that we be both free and without error if he had given us only clear perceptions in the intellect (AT 7: 58/CSM 2: 40; AT 7: 61/CSM 2: 42).

On the other hand, a passage from Descartes's replies to Gassendi's Fifth Objections does not seem to fit the compatibilist reading (see AT 7: 316–7/CSM 2: 219–20). Gassendi had argued that the intellect always indirectly determines the will's choice, like this:

Intellectual State → Motivational State → Act of Will

On this model, no external force *directly* determines the will (and there may not even be *indirect* external determination if the intellect is an internal force). Therefore, if Descartes held the compatibilist view of non-determination, we would expect him to count any such act of will as free. However, in his reply he insists that, at least in cases where the intellect is unclear, such indirect determinism would destroy freedom. 'You may be unfree if you wish', he tells Gassendi, 'but I am very pleased with my freedom since I experience it within myself'. He goes on to say that the 'sole point in dispute' is whether the will can determine itself 'towards an object which the intellect does not impel it towards' (AT 7: 377–8/CSM 2: 259–60).

We could save the compatibilist reading from this problem by claiming that the liberty of non-determination (the two-way power equivalent to non-constraint) is not always sufficient for freedom (though it is always necessary for freedom). In cases of clear perception it *is* sufficient for freedom, but in cases of unclear perception freedom *also* requires liberty of indifference. So on a compatibilist reading of 'determined', the definition of freedom's second clause gives a condition that is only *sometimes* sufficient for freedom. Unfortunately, that would be an awkward reading of the second clause. Like the first clause, it purports to tell us what freedom 'simply consists in'.

⁴⁷Campbell, 180.

This language suggests that the second clause presents a condition that is *always* both necessary *and* sufficient for freedom.

Let us turn to the incompatibilist reading of 'determined', according to which liberty of non-determination requires the absence of both direct *and* indirect external determination. To its advantage, this view would make liberty of non-determination always both necessary and sufficient for freedom. However, it seems to produce contradictory results with respect to whether the intellect is an external force. In the great light passage, the intellect indirectly determines the will's act without removing freedom. Therefore, if indirect determination by external forces removes freedom, then the intellect must not be an external force. By contrast, the reply to Gassendi suggests that the intellect's indirect determination *would* remove freedom, which implies that the intellect *is* an external force.

This shows, I think, not that the incompatibilist reading is hopeless, but rather that the intellect can be either internal or external, depending on the situation. My hunch is that 'external' really means 'external to the will or its influence'. In the great light passage, Descartes's clear perceptions are 'internal' forces because (I suspect) they were brought about by an even earlier act of will regarding how to focus attention, an act that was *not* determined by the intellect's contents. Thus, if we trace the chain of sufficient causes back far enough, we find that it originates in the will's own self-determination. By contrast, in Gassendi's picture, the will is never self-determining with respect to the intellect, so the chain of sufficient causes must ultimately originate *outside* the will, in the intellect.

This incompatibilist understanding of liberty of non-determination fits many of Descartes's remarks about freedom, self-determination and attention in later texts.⁴⁸ Furthermore, if (as this reading would have it) the human will is the ultimate causal origin of its free acts, then it seems to resemble the divine will more closely than it would if the alternative possibilities involved in human freedom were ultimately reducible to the absence of constraint.

Indeed, if the incompatibilist interpretation is correct, there is a striking parallel between how humans with clear and distinct perceptions behave, and how God now behaves. When Burman suggested that Descartes's doctrine of divine indifference implied that God 'could have commanded a creature to hate him, and thereby made this a good thing to do', Descartes replied: 'God could not now do this: but we simply do not know what he could have done' (AT 5: 160/CSMK 343). This suggests that for Descartes, once God has established the standards of truth and goodness, God is necessitated by his perfection to uphold those standards. Thus, for example, Descartes can safely claim that because God is perfect, God cannot deceive him (e.g. AT 7: 53/CSM 2: 37). God's actions now are determined (in part)

⁴⁸See esp. *Principles* I.45 (AT 8a: 22/CSM 1: 207) and two letters to Mesland (AT 4: 115–8/CSMK 233–4; AT 4: 173/CSMK 244–6).

by the standards, but this is no real threat to divine freedom because God created the standards. Similarly, on the incompatibilist interpretation, even when the human will is determined by clear and distinct perceptions, it remains free because it is still indirectly self-determining – through an earlier free choice, it played a role in bringing about the clear perception that now determines it.

On the other hand, the incompatibilist reading seems hard to square with passages (cited above) in which Descartes suggests that God could leave us free and at the same time prevent us from ever erring. It remains to be seen whether this type of incompatibilist reading really fits all the relevant texts. However, Descartes's emphasis on the similarity between divine and human freedom seems to weigh in its favour.⁴⁹

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